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Written on February 4, 2016 at 2:34 pm by [Navy Medicine](#)

## **Dental Health and Heart Health**

Filed under [Families](#), [Force health and safety](#), [Heart Disease](#) {[no comments](#)}

by *Lt. Cmdr. Jeffrey Wessel, DDS, MS, Diplomate, American Board of Periodontology*

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The mouth has been described as a gateway to the rest of the body. Poor dental health can not only lead to tooth decay and gum disease but it can also have an impact on your overall health.



Gum disease, or periodontitis, is a common dental disease caused by oral bacteria and is associated with chronic inflammation. It causes loss of the bone that supports the teeth and is the most common cause of tooth loss. But did you know that gum disease not only affects your teeth, it can also have an increasing effect on your heart health? The oral bacteria that cause gum disease can enter the blood stream following routine activities such as chewing and brushing your teeth. These bacteria can negatively affect your heart and blood vessels. The chronic inflammation caused by gum disease has also been associated with an increased risk for heart disease.

As a board-certified Periodontist and current faculty member for the Periodontics Residency Program at the Naval Postgraduate Dental School, I see patients on a daily basis who have been affected by gum disease and the negative impacts the disease, and associated tooth loss, can have on their dental health, systemic health and overall quality of life. Recent estimates indicate more than 47% of American adults, almost 65 million people, have gum disease. Take the steps now to ensure that you maintain not only your dental health but your heart health by preventing gum disease.

Here are a few ways you can maintain optimal dental health and heart health:

- Help prevent gum disease by getting regular dental exams and cleanings and performing proper daily brushing and flossing.
- If you have a family history of gum disease or early tooth loss, tell your dental care provider.
- If you notice bleeding, sore or swollen gums or loose teeth it is important to see your dental care provider. Gum disease often does not hurt, especially in its early stages, so it is important not to ignore these symptoms. Gum disease is easier to treat early.

Dentists in your Navy dental treatment facilities check your gums during your annual dental exams. Cleanings recommended by your dentist can help prevent gum disease. Patients with gum disease can also obtain referrals to a gum disease specialist, or Periodontist, for more advanced care.

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